



(Above) From left, Don Merry, Mark Bouthillier, Skip Bennett, Shore Gregory, Christian Home and Bill Bennett of Island Creek Oyster. (Top right) Island Creek Oyster's award as the oyster-tasting grand champion.

## Homegrown champs

Island Creek  
Oysters wins top  
prize at event

By Andria Farrell  
ANFARREL@CNC.COM

They have been served at local South Shore favorites like Solstice, high-end New York eateries like Per Se and even at

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Don Merry

information about why one oyster tastes so remarkably different than another.

"I think one thing that is definitely important to highlight is the dynamics of Duxbury Bay,"

Skip Bennett founded Island Creek Oysters 15 years ago on a dream that Duxbury Bay, although an unnatural habitat for oysters, was the perfect place to cultivate the crustaceans. The

small farmers that began selling 100,000 oysters a year now sell that in a week.

"It was great event for highlighting aquaculture and oysters and to be recognized the winner amongst such a great group of oysters was really flattering and we are very honored," Gregory said of the contest.

the White House, but now Island Creek Oysters can add "top oyster" to its résumé.

On April 7, at the inaugural oyster-tasting event in Providence sponsored by the East Coast Shellfish Growers Association and the National Shellfisheries Association, Island Creek Oysters won best overall oyster and best looking oysters (external shell). Island Creek Oysters also tied for second place for best flavor and best aftertaste.

"It was pretty important award," Don Merry of Island Creek Oysters said. "I never thought in a million years we would win. I know our oysters are really good, but some of these guys we were up against don't grow a lot of oysters; they spend a lot of time on a few. It is a tough competition; to come out on top was pretty amazing. All of us are extremely proud."

Out of the 19 oysters featured at the tasting, the majority came from Massachusetts, one from the West Coast and the remainder from different parts of the East Coast. The tasting event marked the 100th anniversary of the National Shellfish Association.

Ten judges, ranging from executive chefs, well-known seafood buyers and the author of "A Geography of Oysters," Rowan Jacobsen, judged the oysters. The oysters were judged on look, shuckability, aroma, flavor and aftertaste. A sample of all the oysters was also sent to Brown University for chemical analysis of their salt and mineral contents in an attempt to glean a little

said Shore Gregory, director of business development at Island Creek Oysters. "The quality combined with the passion of our growers forms a great package. This award is great for our oysters, growers and Duxbury."

Gregory said it took the judges about three hours to go through all the oysters, but it was a great event for oysters in general. The cold water, the salinity and the nutrients really contribute to Duxbury Bay being the best bay in country for growing oysters, Gregory said.

"Our guys work very hard to refine their technique and push the envelope to grow oysters 365 days a year, and all that goes into winning an award like this," he said. "I am super proud of our guys."

Every year, as a way to pay homage to its start, Island Creek Oysters hold an oyster festival and, as promised, Gregory said it will be returning for a third season. However, this year the company decided to change the time frame of the festival from spring to fall in the hopes of making it bigger and better.